

Facts and Figures



A close-up view of Hagia (Aya) Sophia's magnificent dome, which rises 56 m/184 ft in height (about 15 stories) and spans a width of approximately 31m/102 ft.

Hagia/Aya Sophia - Facts and Figures	
Location	Istanbul, formerly Constantinople
Purpose	Church, then Mosque, then Museum.
Names	Hagia Sophia – Greek Aya Sofia - Turkish
Length	82 m/270 ft
Width	73 m/240 ft
Height	55m/180 ft
Beginning Date	532 CE
Completion Date	537 CE

Source: <http://www.sacredestinations.co.tu>

Hagia Sophia – A Brief History

Hagia Sophia or “Church of Divine Wisdom” was built by the Byzantine Emperor Justinian in the sixth century as a monument to Christianity and the rise of the eastern Roman Empire. Hagia Sophia remained for centuries the biggest church in the world only being surpassed by the church of St Peter in Rome several centuries later. Hagia Sophia is a spectacular feat of architecture especially considering the limited building methods that were available at the time of construction. Only the best materials were used for building Hagia Sofia, including marble walls and flooring and gold wall and ceiling decorations. The distinguishing feature of Hagia Sofia is the vast dome surrounded by several semi domes, designed to give the visitor an impression of the greatness of God. Unfortunately, Hagia Sofia was damaged soon after it was built due to the earthquake line that Istanbul lies on. Over the centuries it has been repaired several times. Even today there are ongoing repairs or restoration taking place.

Hagia Sophia was turned into a mosque under Sultan Mehmet after he took control of Istanbul from the Byzantines in 1453 CE and remained so for hundreds of years. It was then that the so-called 'Turkish period' started, and several major alterations were made. Under the rule of the Ottomans, Hagia Sophia attained Islamic features, such as the mihrab, the minbar, and the four minarets outside.

The art works surrounding the mihrab include the best samples of Turkish pottery and calligraphy. The large calligraphy inscribed medallions, rounded plates of 7.50 m diameter, hung from the walls were inscribed on by Kazasker Mustafa Izzet Efendi, a famous Ottoman calligrapher. The names of Allah, Muhammed, Omer, Osman, Ali, Hasan, Ebu Bekir and Huseyin are inscribed there. On the sidewalls of the mihrab there are plates written by various Ottoman sultans.

The tombs of Sultan Selim II, Sultan Mehmet III, Sultan Murat III as well as some of their relatives, fountain of Sultan Mahmut I, primary school, soup kitchen, library, Sultan Abdulmecit's meeting place and the mosque timekeeper's (astronomer's) house may be found in the vicinity of the Aya Sophia Museum. All of these, especially the tombs with their interior design, pottery and architecture, are excellent examples of the Ottoman tradition.

Source: <http://www.hagiasofiaistanbul.com>

Hagia Sophia

For over 900 years Hagia Sophia was the home of the Christian Orthodox Patriarch of Constantinople. The Patriarch was an extremely important religious leader, and he held many significant meetings that influenced early Christianity in Hagia Sophia.

Unfortunately nothing remains of the original Hagia Sophia, which was built in the fourth century by Constantine the Great. Constantine was the first Christian emperor and the founder of the city of Constantinople, which he called "the New Rome." The Hagia Sophia was one of several great churches he built in important cities throughout his empire. Following the destruction of Constantine's church, a second was built by his son Constantius and the emperor Theodosius the Great. This second church was burned down during the Nika riots of 532 CE, though fragments of it have been excavated and can be seen today. Hagia Sophia was rebuilt in her present form between 532 CE and 537 CE under the personal supervision of Emperor Justinian I. It is one of the greatest surviving examples of Byzantine architecture, rich with mosaics and marble pillars and coverings.

Hagia Sophia remained a functioning church until May 29, 1453 CE, when Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror entered triumphantly into the city of Constantinople. He was amazed at the beauty of Hagia Sophia and immediately converted it into his imperial mosque. It then served as the principal mosque of Istanbul for almost 500 years. It became a model for many of the Ottoman mosques of Istanbul such as the Blue Mosque, the Suleiman Mosque, the Shehzade Mosque and the Rustem Pasha Mosque.

In 1934 CE, under Turkish president Kemal Atatürk, Hagia Sofia was secularized and turned into the Ayasofya Museum. The prayer rugs were removed, revealing the marble beneath, but the mosaics remained largely plastered over and the building was allowed to decay for some time. Some of the calligraphic panels were moved to other mosques, but eight large circular panels were left and can still be seen today. A 1993 UNESCO mission to Turkey noted falling plaster, dirty marble facings, broken windows, decorative paintings damaged by moisture, and ill-maintained lead roofing. Cleaning, roofing and restoration have since been undertaken; many recent visitors have found their view obstructed by huge scaffolding stretching up into the dome in the center of the building.

Source: <http://www.famousbuildings.ac.tu>

Facts about Hagia Sophia

Hagia Sophia started life as a church built by Emperor Justinian in the 6th century CE. It remained so until 1453 CE when Constantinople was conquered by the Ottoman Turks. Sultan Mehmed II ordered the building to be changed into the Ayasofya Mosque. In 1935 CE, the first Turkish President - Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, converted the mosque into a museum.

Hagia Sophia remained the largest cathedral in the world for a span of thousand years, until the construction of Medieval Seville Cathedral in 1520 CE. The existing structure dates back to 532-537 CE. It was built on the instruction of the Byzantine Emperor Justinian. Isidore of Miletus and Anthemius of Tralles were the designers of the monument. For 1000 years, the monument served as the focal point of the Eastern Orthodox Church.

Hagia Sophia remained the principal mosque of Istanbul for about 500 years. The mosque served as inspiration for the construction the Ottoman mosques, such as Sultan Ahmed Mosque or Blue Mosque of Istanbul, Süleymaniye Mosque, and Rüstem Pasha Mosque.

Hagia Sophia is also referred to as 'Saint Sophia', which means wisdom in Greek. The full name of Hagia Sophia is Church of the Holy Wisdom of God. The church was dedicated to the Holy Wisdom of God, rather than a specific saint named Sophia. Originally, Hagia Sophia was named Megale Ekklesia or the Great Church. The monument is universally acknowledged as one of the great buildings of the world.

The structure of Hagia Sophia has a classic basilica plan. The main ground plan consists of a rectangle, 240 feet in width and 270 feet in length. The area is covered by a central dome with a diameter of 31 meters (102 feet). When the dome was placed on top of Hagia Sophia, its weight caused the walls to lean outward. This made the building unsafe. In order to rebuild the dome, Isidore had to first build up the interior of the walls, so that they were vertical and supported the weight of the new dome. The height of the present dome is approximately twenty feet more than the original one.

The enormous dome of Hagia Sophia has become the model for Byzantine architecture. The dome is shaped like a scalloped shell or the inside of an umbrella, with ribs that extend from its top, down to its base. The unique character of the design of Hagia Sophia shows how it is one of the most advanced and ambitious monuments of ancient architecture.

Source: <http://www.hagia-sophia.org>